

Untreated Dental Caries

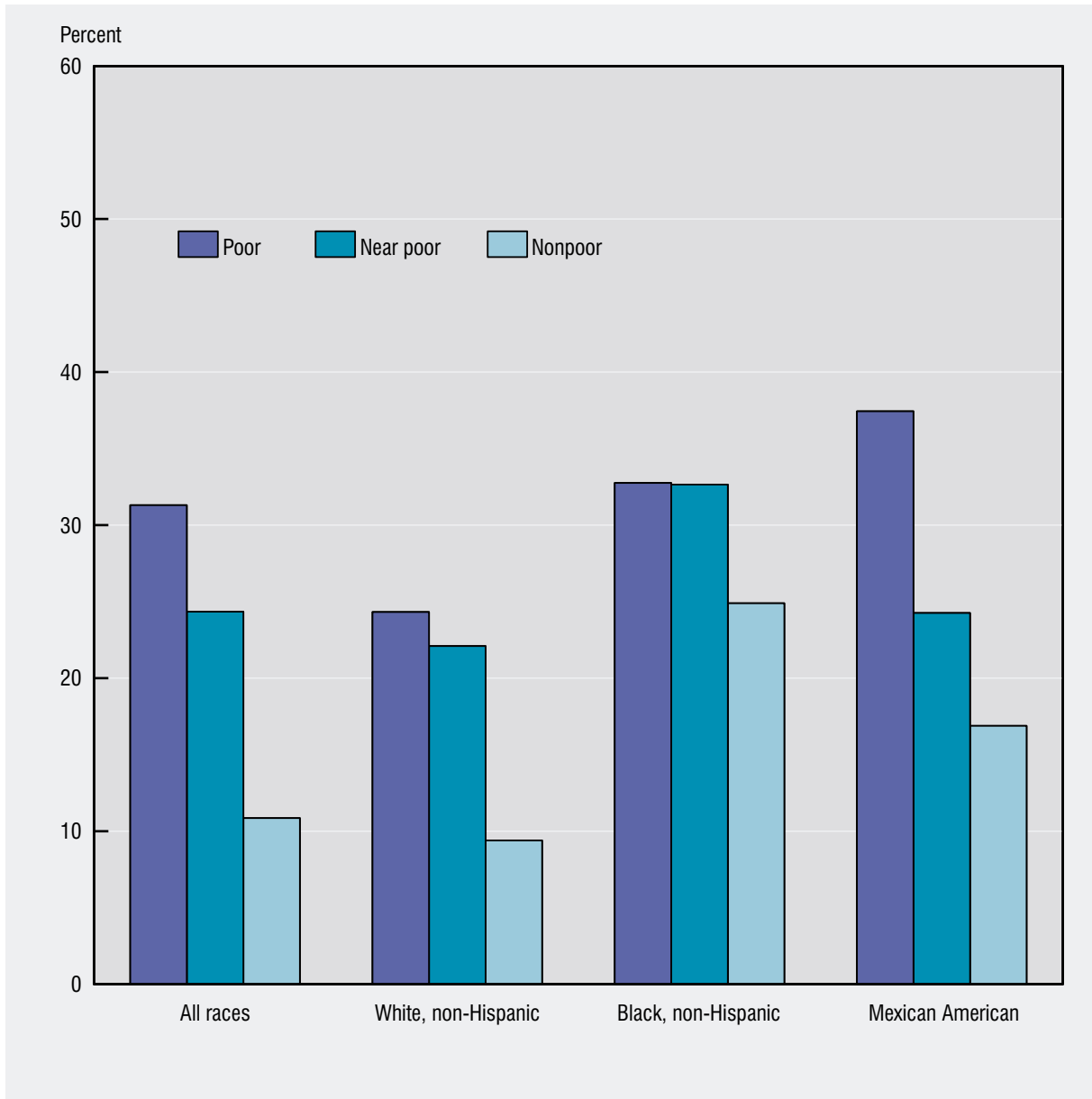
The overall quality of life for adolescents can be negatively affected by untreated dental caries or tooth decay. Dental caries are bacterial infections. If left untreated, dental caries advance and may cause severe pain and possible tooth loss.

- During 1988–94 one-fifth (19 percent) of adolescents 10–19 years of age had at least one untreated caries lesion or active tooth infection. No difference in the proportion of untreated dental caries by age was observed. Healthy People 2010 objectives call for no more than 15 percent of 15-year olds to have one or more teeth with untreated decay (1).
- Although the percent of adolescents affected by dental caries has been decreasing since the 1970s (2), substantial racial and socioeconomic disparities persist. During 1988–94 non-Hispanic black and Mexican-American adolescents were twice as likely as non-Hispanic white adolescents to have at least one untreated caries lesion. The percent of adolescents with untreated caries was three times as high for adolescents with family incomes near or below the Federal poverty level as for adolescents in families with incomes twice the poverty level or higher.
- Dental visits are necessary to treat decayed teeth. In 1997, 77 percent of adolescents had a dental visit in the past year (3). However, poor adolescents (64 percent) were less likely to have had a dental visit in the past year than near-poor and nonpoor adolescents (80 percent).
- Dental insurance reduces economic barriers to dental care; low-income adolescents, particularly those living near poverty are less likely to have dental insurance (51 percent) than adolescents with higher family incomes (65 percent) or those living below the poverty level (60 percent) (4).

References

1. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Healthy People 2010 (Conference Edition, in Two Volumes). Washington: 2000.
2. National Center for Health Statistics. Health, United States, 2000 With Adolescent Health Chartbook. Hyattsville, Maryland: Table 72. 2000.
3. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Health Interview Survey. National Center for Health Statistics. 1997.
4. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. National Health Interview Survey. National Center for Health Statistics. 1995.

Figure 6. Untreated dental caries among adolescents 10–19 years of age, by family income, race, and Hispanic origin: United States, 1988–94



NOTES: Data are based on dental examinations of a sample of the civilian noninstitutionalized population. The income groups are derived from the ratio of the family's income to the Federal poverty threshold, given family size. Poor is less than 100 percent of the poverty threshold; near poor is between 100 and 199 percent of the poverty threshold; nonpoor is 200 percent of the poverty threshold or more. See Data Table for data points graphed.

SOURCE: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Health Statistics, The Third National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES III). See related *Health, United States, 2000*, table 81.